



**Anti-racism is more than just saying “I am not a racist.”**

**Anti-racism is breaking silence.**

Last Friday (March 12, 2021) a group of students at the University of Graz started their virtual **kick-off-event** with these words. **150 people** attended the virtual anti-racism-event, which lasted two hours, via Zoom – an enormously strong sign especially in times like the pandemic in which online events are part of our everyday life and “Zoom fatigue” is a common occurrence. The focus of this kick-off event were four women and their work in areas of activism and anti-racism work in Styria and Austria.

#### **Summary of the evening: Four women and their initiatives against racism**

Mag. Pauline Riesel-Soumaré from the Antidiscrimination Office Styria introduced the situation in Graz and in Styria – especially focusing on the situation of Black women who are particularly vulnerable due to the intersectionality of their identities. 40% of complaints reported to the Antidiscrimination Office are everyday racism. Mag. Fabienne Schantl, a graduate of the University of Graz and currently a teacher at the middle school in Strallegg, showed how anti-racist work can be done in schools. She gave important advice for educators and students in the teacher training program: “When working with younger children, one has to use a slightly different language to talk about racism. But since children also already may have stereotypes about certain groups, it is the teacher’s responsibility to change these attitudes”, says Schantl. Camila Schmid, BSc., founder of the online-project Re-Define Racism and initiator of the petition to rename the “M.-Gassen” in Vienna’s second municipal district, demonstrated in her lecture through examples many different types of racism which people, and especially young Black women, have to face in their everyday life in Austria. She also addressed the colonial past and post-colonialism in Austria. “It often happens that experiences of racism are downplayed or denied”, says Schmid. The latter is even a sort of psychological violence, also known as “gaslighting”. The Graz-based artist and activist Precious Nnebedum, BScN, presented her organization Tanaka, which wants to fight the effects of racism as a community for Black people in Graz. She also said that her writing is a way of activism: “I have experienced racism very early on and I didn’t really know how to react. For me writing is also a

kind of therapy.” Nnebedum ended the event with a poignant and empowering Spoken Word Art Performance about “Black Lives Matter”.

**The project continues: Social-Media-Challenge from March 13th to March 26th**

The **kick-off-event was just the official beginning of the BREAKING SILENCE challenge**. As part of the current **international weeks against racism, a bilingual 14-day (German and English) social-media challenge** is taking place on Instagram, Facebook and on a blog (the latter for those who don't have social media accounts). Every day short inputs are posted which encourage the viewers to reflect and introduce strategies on how to talk about sensitive issues such as racism and discrimination.

**Who is behind it?**

**BREAKING SILENCE GRAZ** is a project organized by eleven students from the Department of American Studies at the University of Graz. The starting point was the seminar “Making Whiteness Visible: Critical Whiteness Studies and Anti-Racist Activism in the Era of #BlackLivesMatter” taught by Dr. Simone Adams. The members of the group are from different countries (including Brazil, Hungary, Germany and Austria). They created the project completely bilingually in order to make it accessible to a German-speaking as well as an international audience.

**LINKS**

INSTAGRAM [@breakingsilencegraz](#)

FACEBOOK [www.facebook.com/breakingsilencegraz](http://www.facebook.com/breakingsilencegraz)

BLOG [www.breaking-silence-graz.medium.com](http://www.breaking-silence-graz.medium.com)

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